

## ***Governor's Healthy Arkansas Program***

### NEWS RELEASE

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Little Rock -- May 4 -- Gov. Mike Huckabee on Tuesday launched the Healthy Arkansas initiative, which he said will be a focus of his administration during the next 32 months. Huckabee unveiled the initiative during news conferences at Little Rock and Lowell.

The governor said the initiative will create incentives and offer information as part of his ongoing effort to make one of the unhealthiest states in the country one of the healthiest. Healthy Arkansas will use existing resources and funding sources in an attempt to convince Arkansans to give up unhealthy habits.

"This effort builds on our major past initiatives such as the ARKids First program to insure children and the CHART plan for spending the state's share of the tobacco lawsuit settlement money," Huckabee said. "Both of those initiatives are making this a healthier state. This is the next logical step in our efforts. We must convince Arkansans that the key to real change is a behavioral change. We eat the wrong foods. We smoke too much. We don't exercise enough. If a person maintains a normal body weight, exercises at least three times each week and doesn't use tobacco, that person will live an average of 13 years longer than he or she would live otherwise."

The Healthy Arkansas initiative will target state employees, Medicaid recipients and other Arkansans. Huckabee has directed the state Department of Health to attempt to achieve the following goals by January 2007:

## ***Governor's Healthy Arkansas Program***

-- Increase from 64 percent to 85 percent the percentage of juveniles who are active at least three times a week for at least 20 minutes.

-- Increase from 15 percent to 30 percent the percentage of adults who exercise at least three times a week for at least 30 minutes.

-- Reduce the percentage of obese children from 11 percent to 5 percent.

-- Reduce the percentage of obese adults from 23 percent to 15 percent.

-- Reduce the percentage of adolescents who smoke from 36 percent to 16 percent.

-- Reduce the percentage of adults who smoke from 24 percent to 12 percent.

Huckabee also has directed the state Department of Human Services to develop a pilot project for the almost 600,000 Arkansans who receive Medicaid benefits. The cost of the Medicaid program in Arkansas is almost \$3 billion annually and is growing at an annual rate of about 9 percent.

"We must rein in the cost of this program," the governor said. "Five percent of the Medicaid cases are taking 50 percent of the Medicaid budget. We have to change people's behavior. Otherwise, the growth of Medicaid will continue to erode the resources we have for public education, public safety and other parts of the state budget."

Kurt Knickrehm, the director of the Department of Human Services, appeared at Tuesday's events along with Dr. Fay Boozman, the director of the Department of Health.

"This effort will blend state resources and the best practices of the private sector," Boozman said. "We're working hard to identify Arkansas companies that have done innovative things to produce a healthier workforce. A healthier workforce means fewer sick days, greater productivity and lower health insurance costs."

At the J.B. Hunt Transport Services Inc. headquarters at Lowell, Huckabee planned to talk about the company's efforts to help its employees improve their health. Through

## ***Governor's Healthy Arkansas Program***

counseling and lifestyle assessments, the company identified what it was spending on health insurance costs in areas that can be impacted by behavior. Those areas include weight, blood pressure, back problems and tobacco-related cancers. The company offers support systems for employees to change their behaviors and then tracks the decreased health insurance costs.

"We're saving millions of dollars in medical costs through this approach," said Mark Greenway, the vice president for human resources at J.B. Hunt. "At the same time, we're building a healthier workforce that misses fewer days of work. Anything that's good for our bottom line and good for our employees is a great fit. I hope employers of all sizes in Arkansas are willing to look at the fiscal impact of changing unhealthy behaviors."

Huckabee said state government will consider offering fiscal incentives in state employee health insurance plans.

"When we established the ARKids First program, we created a medical home for tens of thousands of children who hadn't been seeing a doctor on a regular basis," he said. "Now, we need to take the next logical step and combine a good medical home with behavioral changes."

The governor will receive reports later this year from the Department of Human Services on a proposed pilot project to change the health behaviors of those who receive Medicaid benefits. Meanwhile, the Department of Health will update Huckabee on changes in key health indicator areas. A number of groups, including the Arkansas State Employees Association, have been asked for input on how healthy habits should be rewarded.

The Arkansas Center for Health Improvement recently completed a study of body mass index in Arkansas schoolchildren. Center officials are trying to determine how the BMI measurement project can be expanded to state employees.